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WASHINGTON

The Senate Intelligence Committee notified President Reagan Friday it is beginning a formal investigation of the Iran arms-Contra aid operation and the CIA was reported to be the first subject of the probe.

Chairman Dave Durenberger, R-Minn., and Vice Chairman Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., announced the formal investigation in a letter to Reagan and said its task was to determine the "extent of and authorization for U.S. intelligence activities in connection with the sale of arms to Iran and use of the proceeds to support Nicaraguan rebels."

Letters were also sent to CIA Director William Casey, who testified informally before the committee last week, Secretary of State George Shultz and Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, requesting their cooperation to "ensure that the Executive Branch makes available promptly the necessary witnesses, documents and other information."

Committee spokesman Jim Currie said the committee is requesting that no documents or other materials that may relate to the investigation be destroyed or removed from government custody.

Officials called to testify would do so under oath and all hearings would be closed to the public, Currie said. Subpoenas may be used if necessary, he said.

"We would certainly expect the administration to cooperate fully with this investigation," Currie said.

ABC News reported the hearings will open on Monday with the CIA being the first target of the investigation.

It said a specific inquiry will examine the legality of a CIA flight of weapons to Iran before Reagan approved of such a mission.

ABC said Casey told the committee previously that the CIA has only incomplete records of the U.S. weapons shipment that the CIA secretly flew to Iran last November and that the agency did not know the cargo included arms.

The Intelligence Committee emphasized it will call for questioning any members of the administration it deems necessary, including employees of the National Security Council and "persons acting at their direction."

National security adviser John Poindexter has left his post as a result of the Iran arms controversy and his deputy, Lt. Col. Oliver North, was fired.

The committee is also requesting that all witnesses "provide access to their personnel and records for purpose of this investigation."

"We appreciate your administration's offer to cooperate with the Senate Intelligence Committee in looking into this matter," the letter to Reagan said.